



# Kentucky Fish & Wildlife Commissioner's NEWSLETTER

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## Governor Fletcher announces conservation tax credits legislation before huge crowd



More than 300 supporters wearing hunter orange hats and vests (above) joined Governor Fletcher and several legislators in a show of support for House Bill 354, which awards tax credits to landowners who place conservation easements on their lands. **At right,** Conservation Officers Association president Marcus Bowling was part of the group that met with Governor Fletcher in a preliminary planning meeting for the proposal. Commissioner Jon Gassett and Commission Chairman Charles Martin look on.



More than 300 sportsmen, sports-women, nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts wearing bright orange caps or vests joined Governor Ernie Fletcher on Friday, February 9, at the capitol in a show of support for legislation that will encourage private landowners to voluntarily enter into conservation easements and provide public access to private property for fishing, hunting and wildlife recreation.

The governor stepped to the front, welcomed the excited supporters and called House Bill 354, “a very high-impact, low-cost way to achieve a dramatic increase in land conservation and access to wildlife recreation.”

Fletcher was joined by Representatives Robin Webb, Steve Rudy, Brad Montell, and Brandon Smith, and Senators Gary Tapp and Katie Stine.

Bill supporters filled the capitol’s rotunda and interrupted the governor’s brief address, as well as those from the bill’s sponsors and Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Dr. Jon Gassett, with applause several times.

HB 354 will protect lands by providing conservation easements to individuals and businesses in exchange for state income tax credits to be awarded under the supervision of the department. It also provides for public recreational access to these lands in return for additional tax credits.

“This is the most important piece of conservation legislation that you will see in your lifetimes,” Gassett told the group.

**See “Tax Credits,” page 2.**

**Tax Credits, continued**

The legislation addresses Kentucky's shortage of convenient and accessible land for hunting, fishing, hiking, bird-watching and nature viewing. In Kentucky, public land for fishing and wildlife recreation is limited, with approximately 94 percent of Kentucky land privately owned.

This shortage is often cited as a reason for why these activities are limited or abandoned. The legislation is also intended to ensure that land for wildlife recreation will always be available in areas near urban centers.

"This legislation permits land to remain in private ownership and management while providing tax credits based on the value and duration of the easement," Fletcher told the crowd.

Senator Tapp also called it a "great piece of legislation that will expand opportunities for hunters, anglers and all others who enjoy wildlife across the state."

"Access is one of the biggest issues facing sportsmen and sportswomen today," said Rep. Webb. "This legislation will provide incentives for landowners to open their lands to nature enthusiasts everywhere."

More than 1.5 million Kentuckians and about 287,000 nonresident visitors engage in hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing each year within Kentucky's borders. This activity generates \$3.2 billion in annual economic impact.

"Opening up more land for the public's use will provide more economic development opportunities," said Fletcher. "As Kentucky competes to attract business and industry, the professional workforce that follows demands high-quality outdoor recreation areas where they live and work."

"Conserving land – especially in KY's urban centers – for outdoor recreation is a critical public investment to satisfy these needs and this legislation seeks to ensure land in or near our cities is available," he said.

## Karen Alexy appointed Wildlife Division acting director



Dr. Karen Alexy, Wildlife Division acting director, shows a fox squirrel to her dog, Annie, during a recent squirrel hunting outing in Shelby County.

Research Program Co-ordinator Dr. Karen J. Alexy is now Acting Director of the Division of Wildlife.

Commissioner Jon Gassett appointed Alexy to head the division February 5 after director Jim Lane stepped down.

Alexy, who earned her Doctorate Degree in Forest Resources from Clemson University by researching Meningeal worm and ectoparasite issues associated with Kentucky's elk restoration program, joined the department as research program coordinator in March 2005.

But her association with KDFWR

began long before that. She began working with the elk project in 1999. Then, in 2000, the department funded a Clemson University study of Kentucky's elk restoration in which she was the lead researcher. That grew into a 2005 post-doctoral study with the University of Kentucky that picked up where the previous study ended.

She earned a Masters Degree in Forest Resources from the University of Georgia by researching scrapes communications in wild populations of white-tailed deer. She also earned her BS in wildlife biology at Georgia.

In 2003, she became Clemson's first recipient of its Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award. That followed her 2002 award of Clemson's Outstanding Graduate Student Researcher Award, a university wide competition, and a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Budweiser Conservation Scholarship.

She lists The Wildlife Society and the American Society of Mammalogists among her honorary and

professional memberships. She's authored or co-authored more than a dozen refereed publications, and is published in several dozen more publications and professional journals.







Seven conservation officers graduated Department of Criminal Justice Training's basic police academy this month and were administered the oath of office by Madison Circuit Judge William T. Jennings.

## Seven conservation officer cadets graduate Basic Training

Seven Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources conservation officer cadets joined officers from 11 other agencies Friday, Feb. 2, in graduation ceremonies at the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training's Basic Training Academy in Richmond.

Conservation Officer Rufus P. Cravens, Jr., won Class 377's Academic Achievement Award. He also earned Recruit of Distinction honors and served as a squad leader during the 18-week academy. Conservation Officer Joshua L. Hudson won the class 110 Percent in Physical Fitness and Defensive Tactics Award.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife officers Jeremiah E. Denny, Lowell D. Kennard, Kyle J. Webb, Matthew S. Whalen and Allen W. Wilson were also among 28 graduates who underwent more than 750 hours of recruit-level officer academy instruction.

Major training areas include 40 hours of homeland security training, orientation for new law enforcement families, law of-

fenses and procedures, vehicle operations, firearms, investigation, first aid/CPR, patrol procedures, and mechanics of arrest, restraint and control.

"They have done very well and I'm very proud of their achievements," said Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement Director Col. Bob Milligan. "They will be an excellent and welcome addition to our ranks."

"They are preparing now to enter 10 weeks of our fish and wildlife academy," said Milligan. "They should finish just in time to become fully engaged in the field for turkey season."

After the fish and wildlife academy, the officers will complete their initial training by working with field training officers for 12 weeks.

Cravens will eventually be working in Rockcastle County; Hudson in Marshall; Denny in Boone; Kennard in Morgan; Webb in Carlisle; Whalen in Trimble and Wilson in Green counties.

## Wildlife Division Staff Meeting

**Steve Beam**

**Southeast Wildlife Region Coordinator**

The recent Wildlife Division staff meeting (January 30 – February 1) at Lake Cumberland State Park focused on Herbicide Use in Wildlife Management while also touching on program reports and divisional issues and general updates.

There were numerous, informative presentations from outside professionals on various topics related to herbicide techniques, rules, and usage. Several staff made presentations sharing personal experiences and passing on knowledge gained on how to use herbicides to best deal with vegetative management issues.

Most importantly, the meeting provided an opportunity for staff to network with peers and catch up with old friends.

In addition to an agenda packed with excellent speakers and pertinent material, one of the most interesting moments of the meeting was when staff who did not yet work for KDFWR when Wildlife Division had its last staff meeting in 2004 were asked to stand.

Approximately one third of the room stood, having been hired in the last three years.

Next, all staff eligible to retire in the upcoming two years were asked to join them. It appeared that well over half the room was standing.

This visual exercise highlighted the importance of Commissioner Gassett's regional meeting request for staff nearing retirement to pass on as much accumulated knowledge as possible before leaving. The Wildlife Division has gained many new faces in the past

See "Wildlife Meeting," page 5.



The Lake Cumberland water level drawdown to 680 feet MSL has the left boat and swim dock at the department's Conservation Camp Earl Wallace floating considerably lower.

similar leakage problem.

The new wall will be 1,600 ft longer and 75 ft deeper than the previous wall. Before this \$310m project begins in 2008, the Corps is applying emergency grouting in high-seepage areas. The success of this emergency grouting will determine whether the lake level will change beginning in 2008.

There are multiple issues for the Department associated with the new 680 elevation. These include the following:

#### **Access for boaters and anglers**

There are approximately 66 boat access sites on the lake, but 48 are considered improved

sites. Only four will remain accessible. The Corps has completed a survey to determine which can be extended. Funding mechanisms for extending these additional sites are in progress. The Corps will fund extension of their ramps and ramps at major commercial marinas.

#### **Fishing**

Fishing success in the lake should be better due to the lower pool and confining of the populations into a smaller area. The lake will be reduced by 13,000 acres to a new pool acreage of 37,000 acres. However, the overall volume of the lake will be reduced by 47 percent.

The Cumberland River below the

## **Staff focusing on Lake Cumberland Drawdown**

Lake Cumberland has dominated a lot of staff time following the recent announcement of a precautionary drawdown.

Lake Cumberland has a normal summer pool elevation of 723 Mean Sea Level (msl). The Army Corps of Engineers now plans to maintain a year-round pool of 680 msl – a 43-foot reduction. Approximately 300 test wells in the earthen portion of the dam measure pressure and seepage.

The level of seepage has remained somewhat constant for several years. As a result, the Corps had planned a major dam rehabilitation project for several years.

The Corps originally hoped to maintain normal pool operation, but recently (post-Katrina) developed a new review plan

for their dam safety program. A new committee recommends this pool reduction.

Apparently, an even lower pool reduction was recommended – approximately 610 msl. Although the compromise 680 level has created multiple issues, any further reduction would have jeopardized the limited operation of hydropower production at the dam, operation of a coal-fired electric generating plant at Burnside, and use of most water intake structures furnishing water for more than 200,000 people.

The dam rehabilitation could take 5 – 7 years. A new concrete diaphragm wall will be constructed within the earthen embankment portion of the dam and replace a wall constructed in 1970's during a



dam will possibly experience some higher flows to maintain the lower lake level. In the late summer flows will potentially be significantly less due to less available water for hydropower productions. High flows impede fishing success and low flow can enhance success.

### Fish Populations

Warm water fish populations in the lake should not be significantly impacted. Spawning success for largemouth bass could be reduced by the loss of shallow water habitat in the major embayments. New artificial habitat will be added to these embayments prior to May spawning period.

Also, if the lake remains low for multiple years – a major habitat improvement program will be initiated in these dewatered zones. This will hopefully help create the “new lake effect” when the normal lake level returns.

Most troublesome is the possible loss of the cool/cold water zone in the lake. This zone is valuable for the late summer survival of both striped bass and walleye. The Department is working with the Corps on possible water-management mitigation measures; however, these are very limited.

Available coldwater is also critical for downstream discharges. There is 70 miles of coldwater trout habitat below the lake

that will require a minimum coldwater release year-round. The availability of coldwater could be limited with this volume reduction.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service operates the Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery below the dam and provides the Department



Besides exposing thousands of acres of lake bed (top photo), the water level drawdown at Lake Cumberland to 680 feet MSL grounded portions of some marinas. Caverns in the limestone bedrock beneath the Wolf Creek dam (bottom photo) are allowing lake water to escape and the Army Corps of Engineers is attempting to stop the leakage.

### Wildlife Meeting, continued

three years and the process will only be accelerated over the next couple of years.

Some points of discussion among employees included consistencies in hiring, raises for technician and game foreman classifications, a need for more law enforcement on some areas, position classification requirements, bill payment and employee recognitions.

At the Wildlife Division staff meeting, awards are presented. Because this year's meeting included nominations for various awards from '04 – '06, the list was lengthy. There were 21 staff members recognized for these nominations.

Dan Crank, Wildlife Biologist, Big Game Program and Herbie Adams, Game Management Foreman, Fishtrap WMA, were awarded ACE awards for their outstanding contributions to Wildlife Division efforts.

about 800,000 trout annually. They harbor concerns that water quantity and quality will be reduced – and possibly reduce their ability to meet production goals.

A trout stocking reduction plan is being developed by the Department. The Department has requested mitigation by extending the hatchery's water intake system deeper into the lake and an auxiliary pumping system from the river with the addition of supplemental oxygen.

Many people are working on the issues associated with this drawdown. Human safety is paramount and obviously this concern prompted this new drawdown level.

The Governor's office has established a task force to openly communicate and coordinate activities within state government, including the remote possibility of a dam breach.

The emergency grouting that will be completed in 2007 could be our “silver lining” and the drawdown could be relaxed to the 705 level or better.